

I am a phone operator for the Indiana Telephone Privacy List, taking names and phone numbers for our state's "Do Not Call" privacy list. I have been listening to individual's complaints for over a year and a half now (since our program started).

The program has been incredibly popular and has proven to be quite effective, judging by the experiences of people calling in to list a new phone number after moving to a new address.

The principle complaint is against telemarketers who dial multiple numbers and disconnect when the first response is connected to an operator. I believe this technique is called "Predictive Dialing" and results in many consumers picking up their phone to a "dead" line. This often occurs numerous times a day for those who are not quick enough to answer as their phone numbers go back into the "pool" for redialing.

This is especially severe for the elderly who usually can't get to the phone in time to ever talk to an operator and who therefore can receive as many as 30 "dead line" calls a day - this can go on for days or weeks. Those who "rush" to the phone run the risk of falling and breaking bones - I have heard numerous stories of this happening, usually from sons and daughters putting their elderly parents on the "do not call" list.

I cannot begin to communicate the extent of public anger over an "out of control" telemarketing industry that flouts federal laws, ignores requests to be removed from calling lists, and which in many cases seems to target vulnerable citizen populations like the elderly for "high pressure" sales tactics.

My own personal story involves my son, who on the day he turned 18 received a telemarketing call at 9 am in the morning in which he got high pressured into "establishing his credit" with a 21% interest MasterCard with a \$500 credit limit and a \$250 "credit establishment fee". He had only been old enough make such a binding legal committment for a matter of hours and someone had targeted him! Fortunately, he had written down their phone number and I called them back and after threatening legal action got them to cancel the credit card, though my son had to get back on the phone to do it and they AGAIN high pressured him to keep the card for nearly 15 minutes! We also had to go to the bank to see that the automatic withdrawal of the \$250 didn't occur.

I was, quite understandably, furious! The telemarketing industry is out of control with a few rare exceptions of responsible telemarketing firms that do obey all laws and regulations. I worked for Dial America one summer and I do respect that there are such companies.

I support the establishment of a National Telephone Privacy List similar to what many states have already implemented. If there are to be exceptions, it should be for Federally licensed telemarketers who commit to full compliance with thorough, effective guidelines to regulate the industry.

Such guidelines would include restrictions on hours in which calls could be made, prohibition of "hard sell" tactics and abusive language, absolute requirements for providing caller ID and a working "call back" phone number, and a prohibition on "predictive dialing" - mandating that if a call is made there will be an operator available to service the call when it is answered.

A national list could have several levels of caller availability such as acceptance of "Federally licensed telemarketers" or a blanket prohibition against any telemarketing, and so forth.

It is unfortunate that the direct marketing industry has been brought to this situation, but it is clearly evident that the industry cannot police itself and federal regulation has become absolutely essential.

I cannot begin to describe the level of public outrage on this issue. I have taken many, many thousands of calls and heard an endless array of complaints and horror stories... far more than any hearing could produce. Many of the stories have been heartbreaking... elderly citizens afraid to pick up their own phone... terrified by "dead lines" and afraid that someone is stalking them or preparing for a robbery attempt... stories of unwanted deductions from bank accounts after high pressure sales calls... I could discuss this endlessly. Something must be done, now!

Sincerely,

Rhondalynn Brown
Operator, CallNet Services